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Non-response Assessment of a Web-based Navy Quick Poll

Zannette A. Uriell Kimberly P. Whittam Carol E. Newell Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology

> Matthew J. Hargrove The University of Memphis

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Foreword

Navy surveys and polls yield valuable information that is used to evaluate programs and improve policy. In the past, mail-out surveys have been the norm in the Navy, but they are costly and time-consuming. To alleviate these issues, a Quick Poll methodology was created to reduce costs and turnaround time. Because this is a new methodology, its efficiency and effectiveness need to be evaluated. This report details findings from one process improvement study undertaken, specifically looking at the issue of non-response on surveys and polls.

The authors would like to thank the Command Career Counselors, other command points-of-contact, and the Sailors who complete the polls for making the Quick Poll methodology possible. The authors also acknowledge Ms. Evangeline Clewis for her expert assistance with the follow-up survey.

DAVID L. ALDERTON, Ph.D. Director

Executive Summary

Problem

The Quick Poll methodology is relatively new to the Navy, and needs to be studied to determine where improvements are required. A key aspect to be studied is whether respondents to a Quick Poll differ from non-respondents.

Objective

The current study had two main objectives: (1) determine if there are differences between responders and non-responders, and (2) determine if levels of conscientiousness are related to whether or not a person responds to a survey.

Approach

A short follow-up survey was sent to 5,580 Sailors who had been asked previously to take a Quick Poll. The survey included questions from the original Quick Poll as well as questions about the Quick Poll methodology and questions to assess a person's conscientiousness. Different colored business reply envelopes were used to differentiate those who had responded to the original survey from those who had not.

Findings

- 1. Overall, there were no statistically significant differences between responders and non-responders to the original Quick Poll.
- 2. Rates of correct answers to knowledge questions were higher on the follow-up survey than on the original Quick Poll.
- 3. Conscientiousness scale scores were not statistically different between responders and non-responders.

Recommendations

- 1. Determine more efficient means of contacting people quickly.
- 2. Conduct additional Quick Poll follow-up studies to continue refining the methodology.

Contents

Introduction	1
Background	1
Individual Difference Factors and Survey Response	1
Method	2
Results	3
Conscientiousness	7
Open-ended Comments	····· 7
Discussion	8
Limitations	9
References	11
Appendix	A-0
List of Tables	
1. Factors contributing to Sailors' non-response	4
2. Source of information about the original poll by respondent type	
3. Sailor responses to the statement "I have a good understanding of the Fleet	
Response Plan [®] by Respondent Type	6
4. Sailor responses to the statement "Implementation of the Navy's Fleet	
Response Plan will improve the Navy's flexibility and readiness" by respondent type	6
5. Sailor responses to the statement "Summer Pulse '04 adequately	0
demonstrated the Navy's Fleet Response Plan" by respondent type	7

Introduction

Background

Quick Polls were developed to obtain valid and reliable attitudes and opinions of U.S. Navy personnel in a shorter time period than traditional mailout surveys. While traditional Navy surveys have typically been conducted in six months to one year, Quick Polls are completed in 13–21 business days, from question design to results presentation. In the Quick Poll process, short, targeted surveys are administered entirely on the Internet to stratified random samples of Navy Sailors. Navy commands are notified of respondents via the Navy's internal messaging system; the message requests that individuals who are listed in the message be notified that they have been selected to take part in a Quick Poll and that they go to the Internet site listed to complete it. The assistance of command leadership is requested in notifying personnel selected to take the poll, but completion of the poll is voluntary. Because Navy Command Career Counselors (CCCs) interact with such a large proportion of command personnel, the message recommends using CCCs to contact individuals.

Similar to most large-scale, mailout Navy and Department of Defense surveys, Quick Polls typically yield a 30 percent response rate, although this is obtained in a matter of days rather than the months needed on large scale surveys. Previous research has investigated survey non-response on traditional mailout Navy surveys (Newell, Rosenfeld, Harris, & Hindelang, 2004). In that study, individuals who were selected for the 1999 Navy Equal Opportunity/Sexual Harassment Survey were resurveyed over a year later and asked to indicate whether they had responded or not responded to the original survey. It was found that self-reported responders and non-responders did not differ on attitudinal items, but self-reported responders did tend to be more likely to report attending various Navy training than did non-responders. This suggests that responders are more compliant or conscientious than non-responders are.

While we have some information on survey non-responders for surveys using more traditional mail-out methods, the different survey contact methods used with Quick Polls warrant the investigation of non-response issues on these polls as well. The goals of this study are to determine the reasons why respondents did not complete Quick Polls and to investigate if non-responders to Quick Polls differ from responders in their answers to Quick Poll questions.

Individual Difference Factors and Survey Response

In the study examining Navy non-response mentioned above, Newell et al. (2004) found an interesting difference when analyzing results by self-reported responders and non-responders—self-reported responders were more likely to attend Navy training than non-responders. Assuming that the similarities on the attitudinal items accurately reflect a lack of difference between responders and non-responders on key survey items, this finding of differences on these factual training attendance items suggests that individual differences, such as personality traits (e.g., compliance, conscientiousness) or organizational commitment, could impact the tendency to respond to surveys. It may be

that those who are more committed to an organization, or are more conscientious in general, are more likely to complete surveys and comply with organizational functions such as training. Response rate may be more a function of some respondents simply being good organizational citizens, rather than those not responding possessing more negative attitudes about the Navy.

Several studies have investigated the relationship between survey response and individual difference factors (Gershen & McCreary, 1983; Helgeson, Voss, & Terpening, 2002; Johnson & Mowrer, 2000; Marcus & Schutz, 2005; Rogelberg, Conway, Sederberg, Spitzmuller, Aziz, & Knight, 2003). However, these studies have found mixed results between various personality variables and survey response. The individual difference measures that appear to have the best potential link to survey responsiveness include agreeableness and conscientiousness (the tendency to be responsible, dependable, persistent, and achievement oriented [Digman, 1990]). Gershen and McCreary (1983) and Johnson and Mowrer (2000) found no significant associations between response rate and individual differences. However, Marcus and Schutz (2005) did find differences between responders and non-responders on agreeableness, but did not find differences between these two groups on conscientiousness. Further, Rogelberg, Conway, Sederburg, Spitzmuller, Aziz, and Knight (2003) investigated differences between responders and non-responders on the personality variables of agreeableness and conscientiousness, as well as other relevant organizational measures. They found that active non-responders (i.e., those who indicated that they would not complete a survey) differed from responders on satisfaction, agreeableness, and conscientiousness. However, passive non-responders (those who indicated that they would complete a survey and subsequently did not complete the follow-up) did not differ from responders on these variables.

The purposes of this study are twofold. The first is to provide a direct test of potential differences between responders and non-responders on an operational Navy Quick Poll. Non-response follow-ups in military surveys have been rare, but with lower survey response rates there is a need to demonstrate respondent/non-respondent equivalency to support the validity of the findings. Second, the study examines whether conscientiousness is associated with the tendency to respond to Quick Polls.

Method

A short follow-up survey was administered to a group of U.S. Navy officers and enlisted personnel (N = 5,580) who were previously asked to complete a Navy Quick Poll. The original Quick Poll was Internet-based and contained 22 closed-ended items and one open-ended item designed to evaluate the impact of a recent Navy media campaign. The sample for the original poll was selected using a two-stage cluster, stratified random sample approach (Newell, Dever, & Rosenfeld, 2004) with the results statistically weighted to allow generalizing to the larger Navy population.

The follow-up survey was a 1-page, paper-based survey sent to all individuals in the original sample. To identify responders and non-responders to the original poll, the follow-up survey reply envelopes were color-coded to distinguish original poll respondents from non-respondents, based upon the login information of the original poll. The follow-up survey included questions regarding participation and completion of the initial poll, demographics (i.e., military paygrade), several questions from the original poll, and a brief conscientiousness inventory taken from the International Personality Item Pool (2001). The follow-up survey questions are contained in the Appendix.

Results

A total of 975 Navy personnel completed the follow-up survey (response rate of 17.4%), of which 41 percent (n = 398) completed the original Quick Poll and 59 percent (n = 577) did not. Of the respondents, 40 percent were enlisted (n = 388) and 60 percent (n = 572) were officers (15 respondents did not indicate their rank). The analyses were based on records of individuals' response or non-response to the original Quick Poll, and not on their self-reported participation.¹

The participants who did not complete the original Quick Poll were asked to identify reasons why they did not complete it. A large percentage did not respond to the initial Quick Poll questionnaire because they were not told to complete it (53%). Eleven percent of the respondents who did not complete the first poll reported technical problems (e.g., "the web page would not load" or "web site blocked"), while another 11 percent indicated time issues (e.g., more important work and limited computer time). Another 30 percent reported "Other" factors contributed to their non-response, such as not knowing the deadline, transitioning between assignments, or having limited access to the Internet (see Table 1).

-

 $^{^1}$ Of those who returned the follow-up survey, approximately 50% (n=484) indicated that they completed the first Quick Poll. However, for 17% (n=97) of those who reported completing the first survey no initial poll responses were received. Of those who indicated not completing the initial survey (n=437), 2 percent (n=7) reported they had actually returned it. Since self-reported recollections may not be accurate, it was decided to assign respondents to responder and non-responder groups based on whether the records indicated they actually responded or did not.

Table 1 Factors contributing to Sailors' non-response

Reason	Percentage of Non- responders
I was not told to complete the poll.	53
There are more important work demands on my time.	9
The survey Web page would not load.	9
The poll was no longer available.	6
The Web site was blocked due to security reasons.	2
I have limited time to use the computer and prefer to use it for other things.	2
I dislike computer surveys.	2
I don't believe that survey results are used to improve programs/policies.	2
I was not interested in the topic.	1
I did not want to do it.	< 1
I was concerned someone in my chain of command would see the answers.	< 1
I don't trust your organization to keep my answers confidential.	< 1
Other	30

Responders to the original poll were also asked who notified them of the poll. Data from the follow-up study indicated that most Sailors were notified by senior leadership (e.g., their Commanding Officers [CO], Executive Officer [XO], Department Head, or Command Career Counselors [CCC]). Interestingly, a sizable proportion stated that someone else told them to complete it (32%). Of the *non-responders*, 73 percent indicated that nobody told them to complete the survey.

Table 2
Source of information about the original poll by respondent type

	Perd	Percent	
	Responded to Initial Survey	Did not respond to initial survey	
CO	14	3	
XO	12	3	
Department Head	10	3	
Division Head	7	1	
Command Master Chief/Chief of Boat	6	2	
Command Career Counselor	9	3	
Other	32	9	
No One	7	73	

Selected questions from the original poll were also included on the follow-up survey. These included questions regarding respondent's knowledge of material presented in a Navy media campaign. Of these knowledge questions, the majority of respondents answered incorrectly (65% of original responders; 69% of non-responders). In comparison to the results from the original poll, 80 percent of the respondents answered incorrectly.

Participants were questioned about the sources they use to get information about current Navy operations. The majority of participants reported receiving information from the *Navy Times* (57%; a publication by a private company) and official e-mail or Navy Knowledge Online, an official Navy website (56%). Several other important sources regarding Navy operations included the CO's Call (44%), coworkers (46%), news channels (e.g., Fox news, CNN, local news) (46%), and the Internet (40%). There were no differences found in the sources used for information between those who actually returned the Quick Poll and those who did not (ps > .05). These results are quite similar to those obtained in the original poll. The biggest difference is that coworkers (58%) and the CO's Call (56%) were the most reported sources of information in the original poll.

The participants were also asked to what degree they agreed or disagreed with three statements regarding the Fleet Response Plan (a newly implemented Navy policy at the time of the original poll and the subject of the media campaign). A fair number of participants (43% responders, 42% non-responders) agreed that they have a good understanding of the Fleet Response Plan (see Table 3). The chi square analysis was non significant (x^2 (2, N = 967) = 0.52, p = .77). In the original poll, 31 percent agreed they had a good understanding of Fleet Response Plan.

5

Table 3
Sailor responses to the statement "I have a good understanding of the Fleet Response Plan" by Respondent Type

	Percent		
Response	Responded	Did not respond	
Agree	43	42	
Neutral	23	25	
Disagree	35	34	

Forty percent of the respondents (41% responders, 40% non-responders) agreed with the statement that "Implementation of the Navy's Fleet Response Plan will improve the Navy's flexibility and readiness" (see Table 4). Again, the chi square analysis was non significant (x^2 (2, N = 965) = 1.23, p = .54). In comparison, 36 percent of respondents in the original poll agreed with this statement.

Table 4
Sailor responses to the statement "Implementation of the Navy's Fleet Response Plan will improve the Navy's flexibility and readiness" by respondent type

Percent			
Responded	Did not respond		
41	40		
51	49		
8	11		
	Responded 41		

One-fourth of participants (27% responders and 25% non-responders) reported agreement with the statement "Summer Pulse adequately demonstrated the Navy's Fleet Response Plan" (see Table 5). These results again produced a non-significant chi square (x^2 (2, N = 952) = 0.70 p = .71). This finding was very similar to the original poll where 25 percent of respondents also agreed with this statement.

Table 5
Sailor responses to the statement "Summer Pulse '04 adequately demonstrated the Navy's Fleet Response Plan" by respondent type

	Percent		
Response	Responded	Did not respond	
Agree	27	25	
Neutral	66	68	
Disagree	7	8	

Conscientiousness

Questions added to this follow-up survey included a 10-item measure of conscientiousness taken from the International Personality Item Poll (2001). Scores ranged from 1 (not conscientious) to 5 (highly conscientious). The mean scale score was computed, with the maximum score being 50, or highly conscientious. An independent samples T-test was performed to test the mean scores of those who actually responded to the original Quick Poll and those who did not. No statistically significant difference was found between those who responded (M = 42.91) and those who did not (M = 43.26), t(1, 923) = -.936, p > .350.

Open-ended Comments

Along with the closed-item questions, respondents were given the opportunity to provide additional comments at the end of the follow-up survey. A total of 369 comments were provided, and a short content analysis of these responses was conducted by NPRST researchers. Results indicate that most comments contained statements concerning: (1) time allotted to complete the survey, (2) information regarding knowledge of the survey and/or survey topic, (3) survey population, (4) incentives, (5) feedback, (6) survey method and administration, and/or (7) information about the actual survey.

The largest percentage of respondents who provided comments (27%) offered feedback regarding the survey methodology. Sailors offered ideas for improving the way the surveys are administered, such as making the survey via e-mail.

Almost a fourth of the comments (22%) indicated a need for better communication. Sailors indicated communication concerns; some did not know about the survey whereas others did not have full knowledge or understanding of the survey topics. Other comments included statements such as "Get information out that there's a survey out to those that you want to poll," "Make sure we know about them," and "I had no knowledge of the survey." Suggestions for improvement include advertising the survey through the *Navy Times*, on Navy Knowledge Online (NKO), or even through Navy educational classes.

7

Feedback and incentives also comprised a large percentage of the open-ended responses (17%). Sailors reported that they would be more interested in and more likely to complete the surveys if they were given the results. Their comments suggest that they want to know how completing the survey will benefit or affect them and see that the results are being taken seriously and put to use. They recommended that results be published or provided via the Internet. Along with feedback, numerous comments were provided asking for monetary incentives or some type of reward system for completing the surveys. It should be noted that military policy limits the types of incentives that can be given to those completing surveys while at work since participants are essentially already being compensated.

Other comments provided by the respondents dealt with time allotted to complete the survey (5%), survey population (6%), and the survey itself (15%). Many of the responses that fell into one or more of these categories reported needing more time to complete the survey. Some of the Sailors stated that they need more time due to slow mail delivery and limited Internet access. They also specified the need for timely notification to complete the survey. Other respondents focused their comments on the survey itself, stating the need for shorter surveys that included only the important Navy issues, and providing survey items that are clearer.

Discussion

Overall, there were no statistically significant differences between responders and non-responders to a Navy Quick Poll, based on a follow-up survey that both groups completed. Specifically, differences in response behaviors are not related to levels of conscientiousness. This is contrary to the findings of Newell, Rosenfeld, Harris, and Hindelang (2004), who found that conscientiousness was related to survey response behaviors. Since respondents to the Newell et al (2004) study self-identified as being a respondent or a non-respondent, it is possible that their conscientiousness finding was related to whether or not a respondent remembered replying to a survey rather than their actual behavior.

Thus, in an experimental design that accurately identified actual survey responders and non-responders, the responses of these two groups did not systematically differ. This provides a stronger demonstration of the equivalence of respondents and non-respondents on Navy surveys and polls than in Newell, Rosenfeld, Harris, and Hindelang (2004) where respondents and non-respondents were self-identified, rather than being identified based on whether a database indicated that they had actually responded or not.

While responders and non-responders to the follow-up survey did not differ, there was a larger difference between the responses to the original poll and responses to the follow up survey on the knowledge question. For example, a smaller percentage answered the knowledge question incorrectly on the follow-up poll (67%) compared to the 80 percent of respondents who answered incorrectly on the first poll. There are, in this research design, several factors which may have influenced this difference—the 2-

week time delay between the original poll and the follow-up, the different form of administration (Internet versus paper survey)—but the differences between the responses warrant further investigation.

Although the survey did not detect any meaningful differences between responders and non-responders, the survey did provide much useful information that can be used to improve future Navy survey response rates. Responses to both the closed- and openended items indicated the need for a more effective and efficient means of communication to improve methods for administering surveys in general and Quick Polls in particular. In the U.S. Navy, information often cascades from higher-ranking personnel to command leaders, who then report it to their subordinates. A majority of respondents indicated that they did not respond to the initial survey because they were not told to do so, showing that there is a need for better and direct contact and communication with Sailors as a way of increasing survey response rates. Although there is currently no way to directly contact personnel, other methods of contact are being explored. Some open-ended responses suggested the need for personal contact, better means to "get the word out," reminders, and better survey advertising. Implementing these suggestions might result in increased rates of response on future surveys and Quick Polls.

Survey value and survey enjoyment may also be important factor in participation. Survey value refers to the degree to which respondents perceive the survey as being worthwhile (Rogelberg, Fisher, Maynard, Hakel, & Horvath, 2001). Survey enjoyment refers to the degree to which the respondent enjoys completing surveys. Participants' open-ended comments indicated possible low degrees of survey value and survey enjoyment. Comments suggested that respondents are overwhelmed with surveys on top of their regular duties and that surveys should be used for only critical Navy issues. Sailors reported that they do not feel this survey was essential and that they have more important work to complete, thus it is perceived as having limited value. Participants also expressed concern over a lack of feedback and action taken from the survey results. Feedback and action are critical to the perception of survey value and should be included as a part of the survey process. If participants do not feel that their participation is worthwhile, then they will be less inclined to complete future surveys.

In sum, this study adds to a growing literature supporting the notion that the responses of survey respondents and non-respondents do not systematically differ. Despite the often reflexive use of response rates as an index of survey quality, it appears that surveys with lower response rates can provide scientifically reliable population estimates that are not systematically affected by non-response bias.

Limitations

While the current study adds to the literature on non-response, there are some limitations to the present study. The first limitation was the possible incorrect categorization of up to 83 participants. It was determined during the first survey that technical difficulties may have incorrectly recorded use of usernames and passwords. When comparing the number of survey responses to the number of unique usernames and passwords, it was discovered that there were 83 more survey responses than used usernames and passwords. It is likely that individuals entered the survey, completed the

survey, but their usernames and passwords were never deactivated after their responses were submitted. This is likely given the feedback from a small number of Sailors who called to report that after they pressed the "submit" button on the original survey, they received a "timed out" response and were concerned that their responses did not post. As username was not linked to actual survey responses for this Quick Poll, it is impossible to determine if their responses were posted to the database. Therefore, there is the possibility that some individuals did complete the survey, but were classified as "non-responders" according to our records.

To assess the impact of this scenario, additional analyses were conducted. When comparing the results of the analyses using participants' report of participation versus the researchers record of participation, it appeared that there were no significant differences in the output. Therefore, impact of this potential incorrect classification of respondents appears to be minimal. This issue, although insignificant in this study, could pose a problem in future studies and must be dealt with to assure individuals are correctly identified as responders and non-responders.

Other possible limitations are related to aspects of this research design. For example, in the original poll, Sailors were to be notified by command leaders. In the follow-up survey, members of the sample received a personalized, individual letter at their command address. This personalized letter may have an impact on participation and influenced the results. Further, the follow-up survey was shorter than the original poll and did not require any access to the Internet. These possible mode effects may have impacted the results as noted above.

Finally, the response rate to the follow-up survey was much lower than the response rate to the original poll. While perhaps not unexpected, especially among individuals who had already completed the original Quick Poll, there remains the possibility of self-selection, which could obscure differences between groups.

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Appendix: Non-response Survey

Dear Sailor.

We are conducting a study to learn how Sailors like you feel about Navy surveys in which you are invited to participate. An example of a recent survey is the CNP Navy Quick Poll about the Summer Pulse '04 Exercise. This survey was conducted 20 - 27 October, and asked about opinions and knowledge of the Fleet Response Plan (FRP) and the Summer Pulse '04 Exercise.

This is a follow-on study to that CNP Navy Quick Poll, designed to help us find ways to increase the number of Sailors who take the time to provide us their opinions. A few questions from the Summer Pulse '04 poll will be used as a "quality check" to see if the responses we are currently gathering are similar to those obtained on that poll.

If you have any questions, please contact the Navy Survey Line at (901) 874-2202, DSN 882-2202, or MILL_Navyquickpolling@navy.mil.

PRIVACY ACT STATEMENT

Authority to request this information is granted under Title 5, U.S. Code 301, and Department of the Navy Regulations. License to administer this survey is granted under OPNAV Report Control Symbol 1000-4, which expires on 28 February 2005.

<u>PURPOSE</u>: The purpose of this questionnaire is to collect data to evaluate existing and proposed Navy personnel policies, procedures, and programs.

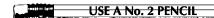
<u>ROUTINE USES:</u> The information provided in this questionnaire will be analyzed by the Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology Department. The data files will be maintained by the Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology Department where they may be used for determining changing trends in the Navy.

<u>ANONYMITY:</u> All responses will be held in confidence by the Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology Department. Information you provide will be considered only when statistically summarized with the responses of others, and will not be attributable to any single individual.

<u>PARTICIPATION:</u> Completion of this questionnaire is entirely voluntary. Failure to respond to any of the questions will NOT result in any penalties except possible lack of representation of your views in the final results and outcomes.

MARKING INSTRUCTIONS

- Use a No. 2 pencil only.
- Do not use ink, ballpoint, or felt tip pens.
- Make solid marks that fill the response completely.
- Erase cleanly any marks you wish to change.
- · Make no stray marks on this form.



INCORRECT: ØØ © ○
CORRECT: ■

Please complete this survey as soon as possible and return in the enclosed envelope to:

Commanding Officer
Survey Operations Center (SOC)
Navy Personnel Research, Studies, and Technology (PERS-14)
5720 Integrity Drive
Millington, TN 38055-1400

SUMMER PULSE 04 FOLLOW-ON SURVEY

1. [N	Did you complete the recent web-based CNP Navy Quick Poll about Summer Pulse '04?	7. Please check the information sources below you normally use to get information about current operations in the Navy. Please select ALL that apply.
(((((((((((((((((((Yes (skip to Question 3) No Don't know f you did not complete the CNP Navy Quick Poll, why not? (Mark all that apply.) I was not told to complete the poll I was not interested in the topic The survey Web page would not load I did not want to do it I was concerned someone in my chain of command would see the answers The Web site was blocked due to security reasons There are more important work demands on my time I have limited time to use the computer and prefer to use it for other things The poll was no longer available I don't trust your organization to keep my answers confidential I dislike computer surveys I don't believe that survey results are used	CO's Call Co-workers Direct supervisor Morning Quarters Official e-mail / Navy Knowledge Online (www.nko.navy.mil) Base newspaper Command newsletter Navy NewsStand Navy Times Site TV The internet (e.g., Google) News channel (i.e., Fox News, CNN, local news) Newspaper or magazine (i.e. Washington Post, New York Times, Virginia Pilot) Radio Other None 8. Please rate your agreement or disagreement with the following statements:
	to improve program/policies Other Who asked you to complete the poll? (Select	TAGICO TOP DISASTER
4. A. A. C.	CO C	a. I have a good understanding of the Fleet Response Plan b. Implementation of the Navy's Fleet Response Plan will improve the Navy's flexibility and readiness. c. Summer Pulse '04 adequately demonstrated the Navy's Fleet Response Plan. 9. Below are phrases describing people's behaviors. Please use the rating scale to describe how accurately each statement describes you. Describe yourself as you honestly see yourself now, not as you wish to be in the future.
	Image: square of the content of the	a. Am always prepared. b. Pay attention to details. c. Waste my time. d. Get chores done right away. e. Find it difficult to get down to work.
	How many carrier groups participated in Summer Pulse '04? 3 3 4 5 6 7 8	f. Do just enough work to get by. g. Don't see things through. h. Carry out my plans. i. Make plans and stick to them. j. Shirk my duties. 10. Do you have any suggestions to increase participation by Sailors like you in these surveys?

THANK YOU

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